戦慄の闇鍋バトル

精霊使いの剣舞

志瑞祐

Extra.5

The Terrifying Mystery Hotpot Battle

Part 1

One day, after finishing their patrol of the Academy town, Kamito and Ellis returned to the Sylphid Knights headquarters inside the Academy to write their report.

"Fortunately, things are peaceful today too—"

"Mm-hmm. After that match, the Academy's disrupted order has gradually recovered."

After recording the results of today's patrol in her report, Ellis nodded firmly.

Indeed, for the past few days, conflicts and all kinds of problems in the Academy were decreasing at a visible rate.

The direct reason one could think of was most likely the match held one week ago for determining the Academy's representatives for the Blade Dance.

On one side was the Academy's strongest elementalist and former captain of the Sylphid Knights, Velsaria Eva. Yet such an accomplished character had been defeated spectacularly by the team of the current captain of the Knights, Ellis.

Thanks to that, the members of the Sylphid Knights who originally looked down on Ellis began to approve of their captain, thus finally reviving the organization's functionality.

"...Thus, today's work is over. Good job, Kamito."

Putting the report into a file, Ellis stood up from her chair.

Just as she was about to return the file to a shelf, Ellis suddenly stopped.

"...Oh right. I almost forgot this."

Ellis reached for a file on the side and sighed lightly.

"...What's that?"

"Hmm, this is a report about complaints the Knights have received from students. But due to the recent lack of manpower, we did not have the luxury of handling these matters, hence we could only—"

While answering Kamito's question, Ellis flipped through the file with a fluttering sound.

"A few days ago, there has been a rumor about strange noises coming from the storehouse behind the Academy. Since it was quite unsettling, the Knights were asked to investigate, but the matter was forgotten amidst all the hectic work—"

"There's a storehouse behind the Academy?"

Kamito asked with his head tilted. There was only a stable behind the school building without any storehouse to his knowledge.

"...Well, my original dwelling did look kind of like a storehouse."

"L-Let us not dig up the past, okay...?"

Ellis averted eye contact in a fluster, coughed and cleared her throat.

"This storehouse is referring to a building in the forest behind the Academy."

"Inside the forest huh? In that case, couldn't the strange noises be made by a spirit that had gotten lost and entered it?"

"More than likely, that is probably what happened—"

Ellis nodded without rejecting the idea.

"However, there is a part of the rumor that is quite concerning."

"...Quite concerning?"

"Indeed... Apparently, someone has seen a figure inside the storehouse."

"A figure huh... I see now."

Kamito fell into deep thought and muttered quietly.

Only high-ranked spirits like Est were capable of expressing fully human forms. It would be unthinkable for such a high-ranked spirit to be appearing in that kind of place.

"Oh well, it is just a rumor after all. That place has always been involved with all kinds of legends."

"Legends?"

"Indeed. Kamito, you may not know since you are new, but one legend tells of a spirit residing there that has the ability to grant all wishes."

"The ability to grant all wishes... How can such a convenient spirit exist?"

Kamito remarked with a raised eyebrow. If anything in this world was capable of that, it would have to be something on the same level as the miracle of the Elemental Lords granted to victors of the Blade Dance tournament.

"Naturally, this is a rumor circulating among gossiping students. In truth, nosy students have gone to investigate many times in the past, but never found even a shadow of the spirit."

Saying that, Ellis shrugged.

"...That being said, since complaints have been filed, an investigation must be conducted. My apologies, Kamito, but could you accompany me?"

"Sure, I'm actually a bit curious about that rumor too."

As a result, the two of them walked to the storehouse in the forest with lanterns in their hands.

Part 2

The sun had set completely. The forest was totally dark.

The lantern glowed from a sealed fire spirit, illuminating the outline of the

building standing in the middle of the forest.

"...Hey Ellis."

"What is the matter?"

"Why did they build a house in this kind of place?"

Looking at it from outside, it did not look like a storehouse no matter what—

Rather, it seemed more like someone's residence, and quite a grand mansion to boot.

"This was originally the headmistress' secondary residence that also served as a research facility."

"...Greyworth the hag's lab, huh?"

Kamito muttered with a bitter face.

Brushing aside the vines around the grated gate, Ellis opened the entrance and entered.

"Using an entire house for storage, that's really generous."

"Really? Back home, the storehouse was converted from an entire ancient castle."

"That's a totally different scale..."

Kamito lowered his voice and remarked in exasperation.

(...Come to think of it, Ellis is a young lady from a high-ranking aristocratic family.)

Due to interacting normally with the girls all the time, Kamito accidentally forgot this fact. If anything, Ellis and the other girls were supposed to be noble young ladies whom commoners like Kamito could not retort a single word against.

"Even so, this place really creeps me out when I look at it..."

The house itself was quite magnificent, but the walls were overgrown with countless brambles and ivy vines, giving off a creepy atmosphere like a standard haunted house... Given such an appearance, it was no wonder that there were so many strange rumors.

"...It's like anything could rush out any time."

"S-Stop saying nonsense...!"

Kamito simply whispered but Ellis shuddered on the side.

"...Ellis, don't tell me you're afraid of ghosts?"

"O-O-O-Of course not! I-I-I will have you know that I am a knight from the House of Fahrengart!"

Ellis denied with her face bright red.

"...Oh okay. Sorry about that."

Kamito smiled wryly in return and reached for the door handle.

Part 3

...C-Creak... The stairs groaned with every step.

The interior of the house was covered in dust. None of the spirit crystals installed on teh walls for lighting reacted when infused with divine power. The spirits in them had probably all escaped long ago.

"Careful or else you might break the floorboards."

"Y-Yes, be careful... Wah!"

Kamito swiftly caught Ellis by the arm just as her step penetrated a floorboard.

"...Are you okay, Ellis?"

"Y-Yes, I suppose, I am fine..."

Blushing bright red, Ellis shook off Kamito's hand.

"L-Let us proceed..."

Clearing her throat, Ellis stepped forward.

Then she stopped in front of a room with a sign saying library.

"According to reports, the sighted figure was apparently in this room on the second floor—"

Gripping the hilt of the sword at her waist, Ellis opened the door.

From behind the door came a slight whiff of odor. The interior of the room was surrounded by bookshelves. The floor had been carefully swept clean and there was not a speck of dust in the corridor in front of the room either.

"Are these books all part of Greyworth's collection?"

"Yes, they are all ancient texts gathered from the headmistress' student days. But of course, precious grimoires have all been donated to the Academy's library. None of the books remaining here are particularly valuable."

"But if that's the case, there's something bothering me."

"...Something bothering you?"

Kamito walked to the shelves in front of him and reached for the spine of a book.

"This book's cover is way too new—"

"What!?"

Seeing the cover of the book that Kamito had pulled out, Ellis instantly blushed to her ears.

"*S-Secret Garden*...?"

Indeed, rather than ancient grimoires—

These were romance novels of a slightly excessively racy nature, targeted towards girls.

"This one, this one, and this one too..."

Kamito took out the books from the shelf one by one. *Blooming Flower in the Night*, *Young Lady in the Dungeon*, *The Bullying Count*&mdah;All books of this genre.

"W-Why are such shameless books here...!?"

"...Well, for some reason, I can imagine the reason."

Kamito shrugged and tapped the cover of a book.

"...By the way, don't you find this lineup of books quite familiar—?"

—At that very moment...

"...Hmm? I think I heard something?"

Kamito suddenly looked up.

"W-What!? Q-Quit making strange remarks!"

"No, it's true—"

...than night... pitch-black darkness... devour the world... harbinger of chaos —

"...!?"

Inside the quiet room, distant and bizarre whispers were echoing.

Kamito and Ellis looked at each other then rushed into the corridor.

...Trial... here... alternate dimensional... portal—

"An incantation of spirit magic?"

Ellis charged at the voice's direction in one breath—

"Ellis, wait up! I've heard this voice somewhere before—"

"Brazen knave, what vile machinations are you attempting here!?"

Completely ignoring Kamito's advice, Ellis opened the room's door using

wind magic.

"Kyahhh!" "What is going on!?" "Milady~!" "Hya!"

The storm raged inside the room, causing the girls inside to scream one after another.

"...Y-You!?"

Thus, Ellis froze in her pose, in the middle of releasing magic.

Part 4

"You lot again, problem children of Raven Class!"

Holding the confiscated racy books in her arms, Ellis glared severely at the four girls before her—Claire, Fianna, Rinslet and her maid Carol.

"Y-You've got us wrong..."

"We certainly did not come here to read books or the like!"

Claire and Rinslet were desperately denying the evidence before their eyes.

"Oh? In that case, why is your name written here?"

"U-Umm..."

Claire's gaze escaped to the side.

"Violation of school rules. The Sylphid Knights will step in and handle these things."

"Ah, so cruel!" "You are going too far!"

"Actually, Ellis, aren't you interested in them as well?"

"L-Like, like anyone would be interested in such stupid..."

Fianna's murmur instantly turned Ellis' face bright red in a fluster.

"...In the end, the truth behind the rumor turns out to be Claire and the rest of you."

Watching these young ladies, Kamito sighed in exasperation.

School rules forbade the possession of reading material that could corrupt public morals. To evade the Knights' inspections, Claire and her friends had hidden the books here then sneaked in to read them.

However, Kamito was quite concerned about Claire's attitude.

Claire still seemed a bit restless and uneasy, like she had more to hide.

(...True, Fianna seemed to be chanting some kind of magic just now.)

Kamito looked around the room, made a mess by the wind.

Then he noticed a book that had fallen in a corner.

The wind must have blown it there just now. Unlike the bright covers of the girls' romance novels, it was a grimoire with an aged leather cover. Kamito picked up the book.

"Is this book from the headmistress' collection by any chance?"

Ellis narrowed her eyes and stared at Claire and the others.

"By the way, I heard a strange magical incantation earlier. What on earth was that?"

"W-Well..."

Claire, Rinslet and Fianna exchanged looks in embarrassment—

Then finally, they sighed in resignation.

"...Well, since you witnessed it, we have no choice but to confess."

"Earlier, we were trying out a certain ritual recorded in this book."

"What ritual?"

Hearing Fianna's answer, Ellis raised an eyebrow in doubt.

The girls had discovered *that book* purely by chance.

They were using the library to hide their racy reading material, but discovered the book hidden in the inside of the bookshelf. Given Fianna's excellent aptitude as a princess maiden, she had instinctively discovered this grimoire which definitely held no ordinary power.

Fianna had taken the book back to her room and spent many days to decipher it. Then she discovered that something unbelievable was written in this book.

"...Something unbelievable huh?"

"Yes, what this book records is—"

Fianna paused and spoke with a serious expression.

"The method to summon a spirit capable of granting any wish—"

"What... did you say..."

Ellis gulped.

"Could it be, that rumor, circulating among students..."

"Yes, that rumor is true..."

Fianna nodded firmly.

"Just now, we were here to perform the ritual for summoning this spirit—"

Part 4

A bit of moonlight shot in through the window that was covered by ivy vines and brambles.

Sitting some distance away, Kamito watched as Fianna made preparations for the ritual.

"I-It is just a silly rumor regardless. A spirit capable of granting wishes, pish posh—"

"You can go back alone if you're afraid."

"H-Hmph... I shall confirm the veracity of the rumor at least."

Ellis glared back in response to Claire's taunt. Ellis was taking part under the pretext that a member of the Sylphid Knights needed to be present to supervise the ritual, but in reality, she must be quite interested too.

(...No matter what, it is a spirit able to grant people's wishes, after all.)

Fianna arranged stones neatly on the floor then looked at the grimoire.

"Looks like I need to put a pot here..."

"I have never heard of any magic ritual that requires a pot to carry out."

"Neither have I."

Thud, Fianna placed a pot filled with water onto the arranged stones. This earthenware pot had been taken from the mansion's underground storage, an enchanted artifact with a sealed spirit that finally came in handy.

Claire produced a flame from her hand and lit a fire for the pot.

"...Heat the pot with fire then put in kelp, it says."

Fianna confirmed the ritual's sequence then covered the pot with the lid. Next —

"Could this be the mystery hotpot ritual?"

By the time anyone noticed, Est had taken human form and spoken.

"You've heard of it, Est?"

Est nodded expressionlessly.

"The mystery hotpot ritual is a showdown between elementalists, sharing roots with the Blade Dance tournament. Many an elementalist has fallen in attempts to take on this trial—"

"I-Is it that dangerous a ritual...?"

"Now is your last chance to flee."

Claire smiled fearlessly.

"L-Like anyone is going to flee!"

"I actually feel like running away... But—"

Kamito shrugged.

"Hey Claire—"

"...?"

"Can that pot spirit grant any kind of wish?"

"Yes, of course. But a wish on the level of the Elemental Lords would be impossible—"

"I see..."

Kamito looked at the flickering flames.

(...If I'm lucky, I might be able to find out information about Restia.)

Fianna placed both hands above the pot and solemnly started the ritual incantation.

"—"

"—Darkness summoned, grant us the trial here, alternate dimensional portal, hereby open!"

Instantly, the earthenware pot gave off intense white light, blotting out their vision.

Fianna slowly removed the lid.

Then she exhaled, blowing away the rising steam.

"It appears to have succeeded."

Fianna smiled with satisfaction.

"What is this?"

Looking at the pot's contents, Claire raised an eyebrow and asked.

Inside the pot was an unknown black soup, bubbling and seething.

"The Gate has been opened. Right now, the bottom of this pot is linked to Astral Zero."

"Take turns to eat the ingredients in the pot—"

Rinslet spoke softly.

"The one who remains standing to the very end shall earn the privilege to have an audience with the pot spirit."

Claire nodded nervously.

"...Who'll start?"

Kamito looked at everyone.

"Th-Then I shall begin!"

"Do your best, milady!"

When Rinslet volunteered, Carol cheered for her.

"Hoo—"

Rinslet reached out with chopsticks, plunging them into the soup without hesitation.

...What the chopsticks fished out was a black object that was in the process of melting.

"...W-What is this?"

Rinslet tilted her face, staring at it.

"H-Hurry and eat it—"

Ahm.

Urged by Claire, Rinslet placed the black object into her mouth.

"So sweet... This is chocolate!"

"Looks like the first attempt was quite a lucky strike—"

Fianna shrugged.

"Th-Then I'll go next—Hah!"

Claire swiftly stuck her chopsticks into the pot and stirred the bubbling soup.

"...H-Huh?"

The ingredient she had picked up seemed to have gotten caught somewhere.

"What's wrong?"

"I-I can't lift it..."

Claire pulled hard to haul the object up.

Then—

"...Here!"

The instant she lifted her chopsticks, it appeared before her eyes.

...A gigantic lobster, thirty centimeters in length.

"...H-Hwah!"

"E-Ellis!?"

Ellis screamed adorably and hugged Kamito tightly.

"...W-What a scary face!"

"Hold on, Ellis!"

"What is the meaning of such unruly behavior!?"

"So unfair, I want to too—"

"...Hwah, g-get that thing away!"

Part 5

...However, the likes of chocolate and shrimp could not even be considered a prelude to the terrifying mystery hotpot ritual.

The brutality of the mystery hotpot battle gradually increased.

Ellis forced herself to swallow the melting cream puff in her mouth while Kamito gulped down a chocolate parfait.

"...Urgh, guh, guhguh..."

"K-Kamito, are you alright?"

Seeing Kamito turning pale, Ellis asked in worry.

"Y-Yeah... Th-This kind of thing... I'm used to it... C-Cough..."

"Your voice is trembling..."

When he was a child, Kamito had gone through harsh training at the Instructional School. Shoving all kinds of things into his mouth to survive no matter what, Kamito had acquired the skill of suppressing his sense of taste through self-hypnosis.

(H-However, this is totally...)

...Holding chopsticks, his fingers were trembling. His brain was resisting on a biological level against the fact that he ate a parfait.

"W-Water... Got any water...?"

"Kamito-kun, you get disqualified if you drink water."

Fianna warned.

Incidentally, as the princess maiden presiding over the ritual, Fianna was not a participant.

...Still, it looked like she was the only one enjoying herself. Was it his imagination?

"W-What a harsh ritual..."

"Kamito, does your stomach hurt?"

Est stroked Kamito's back while he laid down on the floor.

"I-It is my turn again..."

Rinslet extended her chopsticks and reached into the pot.

...But what she fished out was a ragged piece of paper.

The writing on the paper seemed to be spirit script.

"...What is this?"

"Hold on, let me look it up—"

Fianna flipped through the grimoire.

"Hmm... Found it, this is the Double Card."

"Double Card?"

Getting a bad feeling, Rinslet grimaced and asked.

"Yes, you have to eat two portions at once."

"W-What, that is going way too far!"

"Next ingredients are salmon roe and sea urchin..."

Floating up from the bottom of the mystery hotpot were salmon roe encrusted with salt crystals and squishy sea urchin flesh.

"M-Milady, this combination is definitely another lucky hit."

"...If only this was not a hotpot."

Rinslet replied with a lamenting look—

Closing her eyes, she swallowed hard.

"...Ugh, ugugu~"

"Milady, a-are you okay, milady!?"

Holding her throat, Rinslet gurgled while rolling on the floor.

"Now Claire, your turn next."

"I-I know, okay..."

Claire's expression was stiff with a fearful look. She reached into the pot with her chopsticks.

"...? It's another card."

"That's the Skip Card. Skipping over the next person, it is now Kamito-kun's turn."

"Y-You must be kidding me..."

"Kamito, you know you can give up, right?"

"...Gah, I know that. I'll take the plunge—Huh? Another card."

"That one is Reverse, so the sequence goes backwards now."

"...Meaning that it's Ellis' turn."

"...K-Kamito, look what you did!"

Ellis tearfully protested.

"S-Sorry..."

Hence, it was Ellis' turn.

What she fished out of the pot was a piece of fried chicken.

"Ellis, this one is definitely a lucky hit!"

"Yes, the fried chicken's oil protects it from absorbing the soup. You are so fortunate."

"I-I see..."

...It looked like everyone's senses had numbed somewhat.

Part 6

...The nightmarish mystery hotpot battle raged on.

"Gah, chocolate cake, this is gonna turn my stomach..." "I-Is marimo algae actually edible?" "Iyahhhh, I don't want to eat locust boiled in soy sauce!" "Hya!

The young ladies were rolling on the floor as though suffocating, almost like a scene with piles of corpses.

Hence, in the fourteenth round... The first competitor dropped out.

"...Sorry, Carol. I cannot... Cough, cough..."

Rinslet had eaten a crepe soggy with black soup.

"Milady, pull yourself together, milady!"

"...Carol, I leave... Mireille, in your hands..."

"Miladyyyyyyyyy!"

Carol's cries fell on deaf ears. Rinslet collapsed and lost consciousness.

"Your courage was commendable, Rinslet Laurenfrost."

"...Yes, I won't forget your deeds."

Claire spoke to the unmoving Rinslet and reached into the pot.

"Ugh, gugu, uhhhh... guh..."

Claire pinched her nose in suffering and ate the pickled squid... How should one describe it? This was a tragic expression of martyrdom that no young lady would want any outsider to witness.

Even so, the seething and bubbling soup of hell was not something that anyone could fathom.

"I guess it's my turn..."

What Kamito fished out was—

"...W-What the heck is this!?"

The "ingredient" he had picked up was something dripping with black soup.

...This was a kneesock, totally saturated with mystery hotpot soup.

"...Hell if anyone can eat this!"

Kamito reflexively fired a protest at Fianna.

"In this mystery hotpot, even inedible things can appear."

"Gah, for real...?"

Kamito stared at the steaming kneesock.

...Its material was likely silk. Silk came from a silkworm's threads, a type of protein. Since it had been cooked for so long, Kamito supposed it should have softened somewhat.

Indeed, it was not something that would disagree with the digestive system, not something totally inedible... Maybe.

(...I...I have to ask about Restia...!)

Kamito resolved himself and closed his eyes.

Then he bit into this kneesock of unknown origin.

"K-Kamito...!" "H-He is seriously eating it!" "Kamito so perverted...!"

Ellis, Claire, followed by Est stared wide-eyed in shock.

"Ugh, gugu, gugugugugugguu...!"

...Naturally, Kamito choked.

"Kamito-kun!" "Wait, Kamito!" "Don't force yourself, Kamito!"

"Guh... I-I'm dying...!"

With the kneesock stuck in his throat, Kamito's consciousness faded away.

(...Fufu, how foolish of you, Kamito. I can't believe you are dying in such a

place.)

(...Yeah, I... am a fool, seriously...)

Seeing Restia with a gentle smile, Kamito began to see his life flash before his eyes.

...Then he lost consciousness.

Part 7

"Finally, it is a duel between me and you, Ellis Fahrengart—"

"Upon my honor as a knight, I shall not lose, Claire Rouge—"

Thus, the final battle began.

Right now, the only people active in the room were Claire and Ellis, with Fianna presiding over the ritual. (As a side note, Est had turned back into a sword the moment Kamito collapsed, whereas Carol had taken the unconscious Rinslet back to the Academy.)

The mystery hotpot's thick soup was bubbling like lava from hell, giving off an evil aura.

"...Before the final showdown, I have a question for you."

Ellis spoke quietly.

"What is it?"

"Claire, what is your wish?"

"...U-Umm, umm..."

Claire glanced at the massive bust belonging to Ellis, who was sitting in front of her—

"...S-Someone like you can never understand... It's a secret."

Then she mournfully turned her gaze away.

"Is that so...?"

"And yours?"

Ellis looked at Kamito, collapsed on the floor.

"I-I was thinking, spending a day with Kamito, a date... It is a s-secret, okay...!"

Finally she yelled, blushing intensely.

"So unfair, you clearly asked me first—"

"D-Didn't you refuse, saying it was a secret too!?"

"Now now, if you two don't hurry up, the time limit will be over."

"G-Got it... Then it's my turn next... Here goes!"

Urged by Fianna, Claire reached into the pot with her chopsticks again.

What Claire picked up was a mass of pure black... As a start, all ingredients in the mystery hotpot would acquire a layer of pitch-blackness from the soup, but this was even blacker than that.

"I don't quite get what this is but... Ahm!"

Claire placed the black mass into her mouth in one go.

"...!"

Then she froze with that expression.

"W-What is the matter, Claire?"

"This is, this is a piece of... charcoal!"

Exhaling a puff of black smoke, Claire collapsed on the floor.

"Why do I get the feeling that she got what she deserved...?"

Fianna shrugged.

"...You win, Ellis... Con... grats..."

Delivering these words with a smile, Claire collapsed completely and stopped

moving.

"Claire..."

"This is no time to be mired in sadness, Ellis. Your turn—"

"Yes, I know—"

Ellis put on a serious expression. Once all the other competitors had dropped out, the wish-granting spirit of the pot could be summoned by drinking the final component, the thick black soup.

"Kamito, Claire, Rinslet... I will not allow your sacrifices to go to waste!"

Ellis picked up the pot and began to drink the thick and oily soup in one breath.

"Ugh, gurgle... guh... ughhhh....!"

...This thick soup was the result of mixing parfait, nattō, cream puff, pickled squid, charcoal, kneesocks, etc. The taste had far surpassed the realm of human cognition and was practically the embodiment of the concept of "disgusting" cooked in a pot.

"Nngu, gu... nn... gu..."

Ellis forced the viscous pitch-black soup down her throat and into her stomach.

"I-I drank it... all..."

—At that very moment, the earthenware pot before her suddenly glowed intensely.

"W-What is going on...?"

"The spirit of the pot is about to appear!"

Fianna cried out.

Then *a certain figure* appeared from the pot.

"...Y-You!?"

Part 8

"...So this is what is currently going on?"

...Three minutes later, Kamito finally regained consciousness and remarked with narrowed eyes.

"Hoo, I can't believe you people actually attempted that mystery hotpot ritual."

In front of the emptied earthenware pot, the beauty with long gray hair smiled with delight.

Indeed, what had appeared from the pot was not some kind of wish-granting spirit—

Instead, it was the headmistress, Greyworth.

"Headmistress, I am unsure what is going on either... What on earth—"

Ellis asked with a puzzled look.

Greyworth glanced at the grimoire that Fianna was holdiing—

"This sure brings back memories. It was decades ago when I created this mystery hotpot ritual—"

"You created this ritual, Headmistress?"

Fianna cocked her head and asked with widened eyes.

"It was a long time ago. Back then, Areishia Spirit Academy did not have the Sylphid Knights established so the school was quite disorderly. Duels between nobles happened on a daily basis—"

With her hand on the pot, Greyworth partially closed her eyes in reminiscence.

"With battles going on, day in and day out, many students got roped in and

were injured. Judging it to be a serious situation, the Ordesia council decided that certain measures must be taken, namely—"

"This mystery hotpot ritual, right...?"

"—Indeed. Back then, I had not become the headmistress yet."

Greyworht nodded. Instead of fighting directly using spirits, elementalists would settle their conflicts through this mystery hotpot battle. This simple method of battle, which had been used since ancient times, was supported by the majority of students, thus bringing an end to many disputes without causing collateral damage.

"So there is this kind of history behind the mystery hotpot ritual."

Ellis nodded approvingly.

"Then the rumor about the spirit in the pot is—"

"Naturally, that kind of thing doesn't exist—"

Greyworth shook her head calmly.

"However, there was a system where the Academy would reward victors of large-scale mystery hotpot battles. Raising their in-school ranking, pardons from punishment, stuff like that. I suppose that rumor probably started circulating among students after this system was abolished, gradually taking on the current form."

What had summoned Greyworth from the pot was the teleportation spell she had set up for rewarding winners. Most likely, she had forgotten to erase the Transfer magic seal and left it there.

"...Oh well, and here I was thinking it could be true."

Kamito slumped his shoulders in disappointment.

"But in a certain sense, the rumor is true—"

"What do you mean?"

Ellis asked the smirking witch.

"If you possess the physical endurance and mental strength to emerge victorious from the harsh mystery hotpot battle, as well as the determination to realize your wish, then the vast majority of wishes will come true in the end, right? That's the meaning."

"What twisted logic..."

Kamito retorted with narrowed eyes... However, she did have a good point. Ultimately, what granted wishes was human willpower, a principle that could not be any simpler.

"I see now. What grants wishes is human willpower huh..."

The straightforward Ellis was moved and recorded these words in her notebook.

"But this mystery hotpot ritual was quickly abolished in the first place. That was after the founding of the Sylphid Knights, thus creating defenders of order in the Academy..."

"I see..."

"I'm so glad that this horrifying system is gone—"

Glancing at Claire who was still collapsed unconscious on the floor, Kamito sighed.

"...Oh well, now that the truth of the rumor is cleared up, the mission of the Knights is accomplished."

"Yes. Let us return to the Academy to prepare a report. And this is to prevent further casualties from appearing ever again."

Ellis stood up and smashed the pot using wind magic.

"...By the way, in the end, what wish did you make, Ellis?"

"...~U-Umm... It is a secret, okay!"

Ellis cried out, blushing intensely.